DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 722 PS 011 370

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TITLE Parent Variables in Young Children's Cooperative Behavior.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Southeastern Conference on Human Development (6th, Alexandria, VA, April 17-19, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affection: Behavior Rating Scales; *Children; *Cooperation: *Discipline; Induction; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Influence; Perspective Taking; *Prosocial Behavior; Sex Differences

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ED184722

Parent Variables in Young Children's Cooperative Behavior

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PS011370

Paper presented at the Southeastern Conference on Human Development, Alexandria, Virginia, April 1980.

ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that both parental affection and the emphasizing of the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of others in discipline techniques are related to young children's cooperativeness. The cooperative behavior of 31 children was measured by both naturalistic observation and behavior ratings. Parents were interviewed and responded to five child-rearing situations and a questionnaire. While mothers' discipline was unrelated to observed or rated cooperation, fathers' discipline tended to be positively related to daughters' cooperativeness and negatively related to sons'. Fathers' affection tended to be related to sons' cooperativeness and mothers' affection to daughters' cooperativeness. Significant relationships were also found with other child/family variables.

Parental discipline methods have often been the focus of research investigating the socialization of prosocial behavior in young children. The ways that parents discipline their children are likely to affect their children's attitute toward themselves and others. These orientations may be expected to help mold children's prosocial inclinations and behavior (Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg, 1977).

A number of studies find that parental use of induction techniques (i.e. those containing references to the implications of the child's behavior for another person) facilitate the development of a prosocial orientation. Hoffman (1963), for example, observed young children's concern for others as indicated by their giving direct and unsolicited help to another child in distress and showing awareness of other's needs. Mothers were interviewed and asked to report the details of their interactions with their child the day before the interview. Consideration for others was fostered mainly by other-oriented discipline (induction), in a non-power-assertive context.

Hoffman & Saltzstein (1967) found that girls' consideration of others as rated by peers was related to parents' use of induction while boys' consideration of others was negatively related to induction. In a later study Hoffman (1975) found that girls' altruistic behavior (as assessed by peers) was related to fathers' use of victim-centered discipline while boys' altruistic behavior was related to mothers' use of victim-centered discipline. Dlugokinski & Firestone (1974) found that third-and fifth-grader's perceived inductive discipline by their parents was associated with other-centered values and with sharing money, if the appeal to share was inductive rather than power-assertive.

It is generally assumed that inductive methods are effective in promoting prosocial behavior by facilitating role-taking ability and empathic sen-

sitivity in the child. Direct evidence comes from a study by Bearison & Cassel (1975). They examined ways in which parents regulate their child's behavior in common parent-child conflicts. Some parents regulate behavior by person-oriented appeals (orienting the child to his feelings, needs, and/or intentions and those of others) while others use predominantly position-oriented appeals (regulatory appeals which directly subsume the behavior to be regulated to a rule governing behavior in terms of the position, status or role of the child). Mothers' use of person-oriented appeals was significantly related to the child's role-taking ability.

The expected relation between role-taking ability and social behavior has been derived most directly from Piaget's theory (Shantz, 1975). Piaget has argued that the egocentric child is unwittingly the prisoner of his own individual perspective and largely ignorant of and unconcerned with the differing perspectives of others. While studies have produced correlational evidence of the relationship between role-taking skills and/or measures of egocentrism to altruistic behavior (e.g. Rubin & Schneider, 1973; Buckley, Siegel & Ness, 1978) and cooperation (Johnson, 1975a, 1975b; Marcus, Telleen & Roke, 1979), evidence of a causal relation comes from Iannotti (1978). He trained 6-year-old children in role-taking. Children in small groups were assigned to different roles in stories and skits which emphasized taking a single perspective different from one's own and exploring a variety of social, cognitive and emotional aspects of that role in relation to the roles played by the other children in the same group. Following training, altruism (donating candy/raisins to a needy child)was significantly greater than for a control group that read the same stories/skits but where role-taking was not emphasized by the trainer.

The present study examines parental correlates of a child's cooperativeness. Cooperation is seen as a reciprocal social behavior that is dependent on

a child's ability to decenter and "take the role of the other" (e.g. Hartup, 1970). It is assumed that parental discipline techniques that facilitate role-taking ability will be related to the child's cooperativeness. Thus, parent use of person-oriented appeals is related to the child's cooperativeness.

Parental affection is also hypothesized to be positively related to cooperativeness. There is evidence that parental nurturance is positively related to prosocial behaviors other than cooperation (e.g. Staub, 1971a, 1975, 1978; Weissbrod, 1976; Yarrow, Scott & Waxler, 1973). Keller (1976) found that perceived parental affection was related to role-taking ability. Parental affection may foster a positive orientation to the parent which may make the child more receptive to inductive discipline (Hoffman, 1975).

METHOD

Cooperation was measured in two ways: (1) naturalistic observation, and (2) ratings by observers. Thirty-one children (13 females, 18 males, mean age 59.39 months) were observed by two independent observers who recorded the presence or absence of cooperative behavior in 10-second time units for a total of 24 minutes per child. The definition of cooperation was taken from Bijou *et al* (1969). Percentage of agreement between observers during the data collection period was 93% based on 864 intervals. Ratings of cooperation on a 7-point scale derived from the definition of cooperation were obtained from the primary and reliability observer. The correlation between observers' ratings was $r = .76$, $N = 31$, $p < .001$. The validity of rated cooperation was evidenced in a correlation between cooperation as rated by the primary observer and coded (observed) cooperation of $r = .46$, $N = 31$, $p < .004$.

Children's parents who agreed to participate in the study (27 mothers and 16 fathers) were interviewed separately by one of three female graduate students trained for the task. Bearison & Cassel's (1975) instrument was administered along with a measure of parental nurturance adapted from Hoffman (1975). In the former case parents were instructed to respond to five child-rearing situations which called for some regulatory behavior on their part: For example:

> What would you say to ____ if he brought you a bunch of flowers but you found out tnat he had gotten them from a neighbor's garden?

> Imagine that _____ one day says that he doesn't want to go to school but he is not sick or anything but just doesn't want to go. What would you say to _____ to get him to go to school?

Parent responses were tape recorded by the interviewer and later transcribed. Each subject-predicate phrase in a parent's transcript that expressed an attempt to regulate his/her child's behavior was considered a single regulatory statement. Each regulatory statement was assigned to one of 14 categories of either person-oriented or position-oriented appeals. Person-oriented appeals are regulatory statements which express the feelings, thoughts, needs, and/or intentions of the parent, the child, and/or a third person who is affected by the child's behavior in a given situation. Person-oriented appeals would include such statements as "I'd worry if you missed school tomorrow"; "I'd feel better if you returned the flowers to our neighbors"; "Your teacher will miss you if you do not go to school."

Position-oriented appeals are regulatory statements which directly subsume the behavior to be regulated to a rule governing the behavior in terms of the position, status or role of the child which may or may not be relative to the specific situation in which the regulator is attempting to regulate the child's behavior. Position-oriented appeals would include such statements as "All children must go to school"; "I'll drive you to school because going to school is one of those things that you have to do".

The number of regulatory statements assigned to each of the 14 categories were summed for each transcript as was the number of statements in the person-oriented and position-oriented categories. This yielded two scores for each transcript: the number of person-oriented statements and the number of position-oriented statements. A single social codes score was derived from each parent's transcript and consisted of the percentage of regulatory appeals that were person-oriented. All tapes, transcripts, and interview forms were coded to minimize experimenter bias.

The reliability of the coding of regulatory appeals was evidenced by a correlation of $r = .83$ between social code scores of two judges for 15 parent transcripts randomly selected from the sample.

In the affection measure parents indicated how frequently they engaged in 16 different behaviors with their child. Five of these behaviors had to do with the expression of affection: (1) calling him/her by a special name that he/she likes; (2) hugging and kissing him/her; (3) joking around with him/her; (4) smiling at him/her, and (5) praising the child for something that he/she did. The frequency scale used was: twice or more a day, about once a day, about once a week, about once a month, about once a year, and never. These responses received weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0, respectively, and the affection score was the sum of the frequency weights for the affection items (Hoffman, 1975).

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that parent use of person-oriented appeals would be associated with a child's cooperativeness. The correlations between all variables are presented in Table 1. For mothers and fathers social code scores were unrelated to either coded or rated cooperation. Analyses performed for boys and girls separately showed that mothers' social code scores were unrelated to cooperativeness for sons and daughters. For girls, fathers' social code scores correlated $r = .58$ ($N = 8$, $p < .06$) with ratings of cooperation. For boys, fathers' social code scores correlated $r = -.71$ ($N = 8$, $p < .02$) and $r = -.75$ ($N = 8$, $p < .02$) with coded and rated cooperation, respectively. These results are summarized in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 1, parental affection is unrelated to cooperation. When examined on the basis of the sex of the child, fathers' affection scores were unrelated to daughters' cooperativeness and only marginally related ($r = .52$, $N = 8$, $p < .09$) to sons' rated cooperation. Affection scores of mothers were uncorrelated with sons' cooperativeness but tended to be positively related to daughters' cooperativeness. Mothers' affect scores correlated $r = .55$ ($N = 13$, $p < .03$) with girls' coded cooperation and $r = .36$ ($N = 13$, $p < .1$) with rated cooperation.

Further analyses considered the relationship between cooperation and other child/parent variables. The number of siblings a child had correlated negatively with coded cooperation ($r = -.48$, $N = 31$, $p < .003$) and rated cooperative ($r = -.64$, $N = 31$, $p < .001$). Analysis of variance on the mean cooperation scores of only children, first-born and later-born children indicated significant differences for coded cooperation ($F(2,30) = 11.592$, $p < .001$). Scheffé technique revealed that only children were more cooperative than first-born and later-born ($p < .05$), with the latter two not differing.

Each parent indicated in the affection measure the frequency with which they played games with their child. For boys alone, mothers' playing games was not related to cooperativeness. However, fathers' playing games was significantly correlated with coded cooperation ($r = .68$, $N = 8$, $p < .03$) and rated cooperation ($r = .67$, $N = 8$, $p < .03$). For girls alone, fathers' playing games was unrelated to cooperation. However, mothers' playing games was significantly correlated with coded cooperation ($r = .51$, $N = 13$, $p < .04$). These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1.

Intercorrelations of All Variables

	Coded Cooperation	Rated Cooperation	Mothers' Affect	Fathers' Affect	Number of Siblings	Playing Games (Mothers)	Playing Games (Fathers)	Social Codes (Mothers)	Social Codes (Fathers
Rated Cooperation	.46 p <.004								
Mothers Affect	.25 p <.1	.18	.03						
Fathers Affect	.32 p <.1	.02							
Number of Siblings	-.48 p <.003	-.64 p <.001	-.18	-.16					
Playing Games (Mothers)	.24	.13	.21	.33	-.30 p <.06				
PLaying Games (Fathers)	.49 p <.03	.13	-.35 p <.1	.38 p <.08	-.12	.50 p <.03			
Social Codes (Mothers)	.02	.07	.07	-.02	-.06	.05	.01		
Social Codes (Fathers)	-.26	-.14	-.21	-.64 p <.004	.22	-.23	-.24	-.01	

Note: N for fathers=16; N for mothers=27

Table 2

Correlations Between Cooperation Measures and Games and Social Codes Variables for Mothers and Fathers by Sex of Child

Cooperation Measure	Mothers[1] Social Codes	Fathers[2] Social Codes	Mother[1] Games	Father[2] Games
BOYS				
CODED (OBSERVED)	-.10	-.71**	-.04	.68**
RATED	-.05	-.75**	.12	.67**
GIRLS				
CODED (OBSERVED)	.07	.28	.51**	.24
RATED	.18	.58*	.15	.39

[1]N=14 [2]N=8 *p <.1 **p <.05

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that parent use of person-oriented appeals, that is regulating behavior by orienting the child to his feelings, needs, and/or intentions and those of others, is positively related to cooperativeness was not supported in the present findings. An important factor may be the child's age. Hoffman (1970), for example, has argued that when parental induction is related to a child's moral development, it is generally after the preschool years.

Fathers' use of person-oriented appeals is negatively related to sons' cooperativeness. Staub (1978) argues that boys are unaffected or negatively affected by verbal communication. In one study of kindergarten children, induction by an experimenter decreased the number of paper clips (dropped by the experimenter) that children picked up (Staub, 1971a). He suggests that this decrease is the result of opposition--a feeling of limitation of freedom and a desire to go contrary to the directions received (cf. Brehm, 1966)--that is evoked in boys:

> Since boys in our culture are trained for independence and self-reliance, and sometimes thought to resist authority, they may be resistant to orders, directions, or verbal communications that can be interpreted as attempts to influence their behavior (Staub, 1978, pp. 78-79).

It was assumed in the present study that the use of person-oriented appeals would be associated with cooperative behavior by facilitating role-taking ability in the child. Thus, parents' orienting their child to covert states (e.g. feelings, needs, intentions, etc.) would facilitate the child's ability to make inferences himself about the covert states of others. Parents responded to typical child-rearing situations that called for some regulatory behavior on their part (the child doesn't want to go to bed, he/she picks neighbors' flowers, etc.).

Perhaps because of the complexity of cooperative behavior and the age of the children involved, the child-rearing situations should have been more closely related to social behavior. How would parents regulate behavior when for example, their child played too aggressively with an age-mate, was playing alone while age-mates played nearby, made a neighbor's child cry by not playing with him/her, etc.? Situations involving peer relations would have more face validity that those used in the present study.

The child-rearing situations tended to emphasize essentially negative feelings: guilt about picking neighbor's flowers or unhappy feelings the neighbor will have; feeling tired and unhappy about having to go to bed, etc. Marcus & Roke (1980) found that the ability to recognize and understand positive feelings (happiness) and not negative feelings (fear, anger, or sadness) was related to a child's cooperativeness. If the child-rearing situations involved peer relations, would the parent's orienting the child to positive aspects of cooperative interactions be related to cooperativeness?

That parental affection is related to cooperativeness received marginal support in the present study. As in the case with social code scores, same-sex effects were evident. Fathers' affection tended to be related to sons' cooperativeness and mothers' affection to daughters' cooperativeness. One problem was that the affection measure was restricted in range: mean scores for mothers and fathers were 23.7 and 23.5, respectively. It could be that simply giving a child warmth, support and affection, even in fairly large amounts, does not ensure that the child will become cooperative. Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg (1977) suggest that nurturance is most effective when it is part of a pattern of child-rearing that prominantly features the modeling of prosocial acts.

Two of the strongest findings of the present study relative to cooperativeness involves the relationships between the number of siblings in the family and parents' playing games with the child. In the former case, the number of siblings in the family was negatively related to cooperativeness, with only children being more cooperative that first born or later born. Few studies of prosocial behavior have examined sibling variables, but those that have find similar negative relationships. (e.g., Staub, 1971a; 1971b). Only children get exposed to more adult models than children of families with more than one child. It may be the exposure to nurturant adult models of cooperativeness (e.g. parents playing games with their child) that makes only children more cooperative. Yarrow et al (1973), for example, found that those children who had been exposed to extended modeling of helping from a nurturant adult were more likely to express sympathy and to give help in a real-life situation. Staub (1971a) found that a female E 's playing games in a nurturant way (as opposed to a task-oriented way) led to a significant increase in a child's active helping a child in distress.

It is clear that future studies of parental variables must include fathers. Very little is known about the role that fathers play in relation to the child's cooperativeness and prosocial behavior in general. The results of the present study indicate that his impact on the child is different from the mother's, particularly in relation to the sex of the child.

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